



***Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond  
March 18-22, 2013***

## **Adding insult to injury: the budget and Indigenous relations**

[Rabble](#)

March 22, 2013

Daniel Wilson



The Government of Canada is trumpeting \$626 million in new investment for Indigenous peoples in yesterday's budget. Let's just say that's a slight exaggeration.

Here's a closer look at the four "investment" areas.

"Supporting First Nations fishing enterprises"

Surprisingly, the largest single-year investment in the 2013 budget for a program aimed at Indigenous people at \$33 million. Like much of what was "announced" yesterday however, it is an extension of an existing program, not new investment.

The Atlantic and Pacific Integrated Commercial Fishing Initiatives were created in response to Supreme Court decisions recognizing the Indigenous right to fish. They are aimed at keeping the peace with some in the non-Indigenous fishery who were unhappy with the recognition of this constitutional right.

The funding does not extend to 2014-15, the year that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is expected to realize "efficiencies" of exactly \$33 million, coincidentally.

The biggest new investment in this category is \$24 million per year over 2 years for First Nations and Inuit health plus \$2 million each of those years for mental health initiatives, totaling \$52 of the \$64 million in new money under this category. It doesn't meet need, but this is the best news in the budget for Indigenous peoples.

The \$9 million over 2 years to allow First Nations to opt into a land management regime outside the Indian Act is also a good thing. At this rate of funding, all First Nations might be able to participate sometime in the 22nd century.

There is \$3 million in new money for First Nations Policing Program funds aimed at shutting down contraband tobacco, surely a high priority in communities with over 3 times the national average in violent crime. The rest continues existing funding.

There is no new or increased funding for the Aboriginal Justice Strategy or Family Violence Prevention Program, but they don't get cut.

The money for "Resolving Specific Claims" is not an investment. It is to settle lawsuits out of court. This is a debt to be paid and it is an insult to First Nations whose treaties have been breached to suggest otherwise. One has to ask if the government would even think of telling other Canadians who were about to win a law suit against it that the payment of that debt was coming out of the goodness of its heart.

#### "Support for First Nations Infrastructure"

There is \$155 million over 10 years, nothing in 2013-14 and almost all of it scheduled for after the next election, conveniently. This averages to \$1.5 million a year for over 630 First Nations, which is less than \$2400 per community for roads, bridges, energy systems and schools. Just the amount needed to put a school in every community that does not currently have one would cost 3 times this amount.

#### "Job Opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples"

The good news is \$5 million for each of 2 years for post-secondary scholarships and another \$1 million for the next 5 years to "promote business studies".

Then there is the big ticket item in the budget, \$241 million over 5 years "to ensure that young recipients have the incentives to participate in the training necessary for them to gain employment". Incentives means workfare, with more than half the funding going to another level of bureaucracy to enforce the new rules.

Rightly called "a slap in the face" by New Democrat leader Tom Mulcair, this workfare program means those unable to participate in training will be denied benefits and so will those communities that refuse to capitulate to this coercion. It is a denial of the fiduciary responsibility of the federal government and most probably unconstitutional.

## Totals

Over the next two years, there is approximately \$87.3 million in new investment, which works out to a little more than \$100 per person. As noted, over \$73 million of this goes to health care or workfare.

What is not in the budget is any new money for education on reserve so that First Nations youth can qualify for the job opportunities the federal government claims it wants people to fill. The gap between what children in provincial schools get and what is provided to those going to on-reserve schools (where they exist) remains the same. The likelihood that this will help to fill jobs with qualified people -- the government's main objective in this budget -- is extremely small.

What is also not there is any money to bring other comparable services to reserves as those provided by the provinces. For example, the 22% gap in funding for child welfare services, about which there is a case in front of the Canadian Human Rights Commission at the moment, is completely ignored. No service for which Canada is responsible to First Nations is funded at levels equal to those of the provinces. It is the inverse of the federal government's initiative to starve First Nations onto reserves and force capitulation to federal land grabs in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 21st century, the plan is to starve people off reserve and enable resource extraction to proceed without all the hassle of dealing with Indigenous rights.

What is also missing is any effort to address the problems that have plagued Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples, especially the odious attack on Indigenous rights in Bill C-45 that led to the Idle No More movement. As noted, insult is added to injury with workfare, claims that legal debts are generous investments, and a complete disregard for the opinions of Indigenous peoples and their governments with continuing development of the rejected education legislation being the prime examples.

One more note on the hypocrisy of the Harper government in this budget.

In 2009, Prime Minister Harper said: "You know, there's two schools in economics on this. One is that there are some good taxes and the other is that no taxes are good taxes. I'm in the latter category. I don't believe that any taxes are good taxes."

Yesterday, the budget said: "Taxation is an integral part of good governance as it promotes greater accountability and self-sufficiency and provides revenues for important public services and investments. Therefore, the Government of Canada supports initiatives that encourage the exercise of direct taxation powers by Aboriginal governments (emphasis added)."

Taxes bad, Aboriginal taxes good. Let's all pretend that there is another word for this kind of contradiction than the obvious one.

## **Inuit to research polar bear den habits in Nunavut: Research to take place on north and east side of Baffin Island**

[CBC News](#)

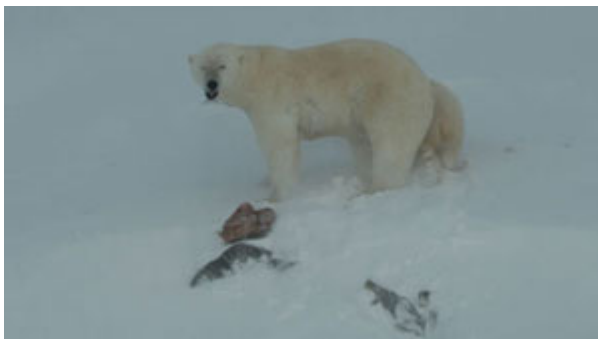
Mar 25, 2013 8:19 AM CT

A group of Inuit in Clyde River, Nunavut, is taking the initiative to research polar bear denning habits on the north and east side of Baffin Island.

A committee was formed to oversee the project.

Inutiq Iqaqrialu, who heads the committee, said there is not a lot scientific information on denning, and that's why he came up with the idea.

"Clyde River, Pond Inlet, Qikiqtarjuaq - we want to understand how many cubs are born in these dens. That's why I began this project and also with the development of Baffinland we need to do more research on our good food sources," said Iqaqrialu in Inuktitut, mentioning the large iron ore mine which was given the green light last year.



*The group plans to research denning habits on the north and east side of Baffin Island in Nunavut. (Paul Tukker/CBC)*

He says he hopes money will come through for a workshop they are planning with Pond Inlet, Clyde River and Qikiqtarjuaq.

Iqaqrialu says they want to hear from

elders first. He says the committee might have to wait until next winter for the field project.

It's getting support from a polar bear conservation centre — the International Polar Bear Conservation Centre, located at the Assiniboine Park Zoo in Winnipeg.

"This is a great initiative on their part and really I see our role as just supporting that however we can," said Stephen Petersen, who is with the centre.

The centre takes in orphaned cubs and raises them for the zoo. Petersen said his research comes only from collected data, but that data is often sporadic and inconsistent.

"Most areas we are noticing just really don't have a lot of information out there on them. What we hope is that with a monitoring strategy that the communities are doing themselves they'll be able to collect that data themselves and look at trends over time."

Petersen says eventually there will be a draft monitoring plan from his research. He says the information collected by Inuit will provide a better understanding of polar bears.

## **First Nations group launches anti-pipeline ads on anniversary of Alaskan oil spill**

[Times Colonist](#)

March 24, 2013



*Crude oil from the tanker Exxon Valdez, top, swirls on the surface of Alaska's Prince William Sound near Naked Island on April 9, 1989. A B.C. First Nations group is launching an anti-pipeline commercial to mark the 24th anniversary of one of the worst oil spills in history. THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP-John Gaps III*

VANCOUVER - The date March 24, 1989 remains a black mark in the minds of environmentalists and coastal communities as they witnessed a massive oil slick unfurl in the waters of Alaska's Prince William Sound.

The Exxon Valdez disaster was one of history's worst oil spills, and twenty-four years later, a B.C. First Nations group is pointing to the

tragedy as proof the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline project should not go forward.

The province's waters are no place for massive tankers exporting oil to Asian markets, according to the executive director of Coastal First Nations, Art Sterritt.

"All of the social, environmental and economic impacts ... are not something that Coast First Nations are about to allow happen to us. We just couldn't survive that," Sterritt said.

Sterritt launched a new social media and television advertising campaign on Sunday, to commemorate the Exxon Valdez spill and provide "an alternative" to pro-pipeline ads by Enbridge, the company behind the hotly-contested project.

"We thought showing people a little bit of reality would be appropriate," Sterritt said. "We think that there might be some people ... becoming a bit numbed by Northern Gateway's \$300-million campaign."

Enbridge launched its own multi-million dollar media and online advertising campaign last May, to sell the public on the economic benefits of the pipeline and the company's safety and oil-spill prevention procedures. According to Northern Gateway manager Paul Stanway, the company spent less than \$5 million to promote the pipeline, which would ship petroleum from Alberta to Kitimat, B.C.

Sterritt refused to disclose how much his group spent on the new ad, but said it will likely be confined to inexpensive northern TV networks and free social media websites unless his group receives additional funding from outside sources.

The two-minute commercial begins with live audio that chronicles the conversation between the oil tanker's crew and the Valdez Vessel Traffic Centre during the harrowing first minutes when the ship ran aground on Bligh Reef.

Photos and video of oil-covered wildlife, rainbow grease islands, and tarred-up beaches follow, soundtracked by Paul Simon's "The Sound of Silence."

"Don't be silent," the commercial's subtitles read. "Vote for an oil-free coast."

The ad contends a similar spill could cost B.C. taxpayers about \$21.4 billion to clean up in today's numbers, and wipe out more than 4,300 tourism and fishing jobs.

Sterritt said the statistics are based analysis and predictions by Dr. Tom Gunton, a former environment minister under Glen Clark who now teaches at Simon Fraser University.

He added that events of recent years have yielded more than enough evidence to warrant a long, hard look at the pitfalls of pipelines and tanker traffic.

"We researched what had happened in Alaska and various other places, and then as we went along, we had all these other lessons delivered up to us — like the Gulf of Mexico ... the Kalamazoo (River)," Sterritt said.

Cleanup efforts and equipment haven't progressed much in the past two decades, based on what he witnessed during the 2010 Gulf of Mexico spill, Sterritt said.

"It was the same technology — throw some booms out there, try to scrape some up, try to burn a little if you can, throw some diluent on it and try to get it to blend in — so that it'll be out of sight, out of mind."

Non-invasive long-term restoration efforts are nearly impossible, according to a 20-year status report by the group of government trustees and scientists tasked with recovery on Alaska's injured coast.

"One of the most stunning revelations ... is that Exxon Valdez oil persists in the environment and in places, is nearly as toxic as it was in the first few weeks," the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council report stated.

"At this rate, the remaining oil will take decades and possibly centuries to disappear entirely," it said.

The spill cost Alaska nearly \$2 billion in clean up over the first few years, the trustee council said, but the non-monetary costs were been just as dear.

The herring population, for example, has never recovered — nor has the commercial herring fishery. Pink and Coho salmon populations have also suffered, as have eagles, otters and seals. Nearly half of the area's 36 killer whales were never seen again after the spill, their carcasses believed to have sunk to watery graves.

The man-made disaster also took a human toll. The tourism and recreation industries were crippled when activities such as hunting, fishing and kayaking ceased. Likewise, many of the 22,000 First Nations people who once relied on subsistence fishing and shellfish gathering in intertidal pools never resumed their activities, with lingering questions about the health of wildlife from Prince William Sound.

In 1991, a judge ordered Exxon Corp. to pay \$900 million in yearly increments to resolve charges of environmental crime.

While the court forgave \$125 million in recognition of the company's clean-up efforts, Exxon Corporation has since been asked to pay an additional \$92 million for "unforeseen" restoration costs.

A number of factors were to blame for the widespread devastation, the trustees council said — among them, the lack of a pre-rehearsed emergency response and adequate equipment to carry out such procedures.

Many of these safety concerns have since been addressed by transportation authorities and tanker companies — including an international ban of single-hull tankers such as the Exxon Valdez. Many ports also now require two escort tugboats, specially-trained pilots who know local waters, and regular oil-spill preparedness and response drills.

While Enbridge has promised "world-class" oil spill prevention and response for the \$6-billion project, lawyers for the provincial government had many unanswered questions as they wrapped up cross examination of company experts at the Northern Gateway review hearings last week.

The project proponent did not demonstrate under oath it would be able to access or respond to a spill in remote areas, said Environment Minister Terry Lake, nor did it show it would be able to recover sunken oil in the event of a spill.

Lake said another concern was Enbridge's lack of land- or marine-spill response plans, something the company said it would provide after the project was approved.

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## APTN Launches Aboriginal Day & Celebration Flag Contest

[Broadcaster](#)

March 25, 2013

Aboriginal Peoples Television Network announces the launch of the seventh annual Aboriginal Day Live & Celebration Flag Contest. The contest is open to residents of Canada aged 12 to 17 years, and is designed to encourage youth to share their vision and pride of Aboriginal heritage.

APTN invites and encourages all youth to design a flag that represents the richness and diversity of all of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples, and illustrates what National Aboriginal Day means to them."

The annual flag contest is part of APTN's Aboriginal Day Live & Celebration event, which include a nationally televised concert featuring live performances by some of



Canada's top Aboriginal artists, slated to take place this year on Saturday June 22, 2013.

The contest winner will receive: a trip to Winnipeg (along with one parent/guardian) including accommodations; an opportunity to be featured on APTN; an invitation to take part in APTN's Aboriginal Day Live & Celebration; and a cash prize of \$500. The winner's flag will be raised above APTN's headquarters in downtown Winnipeg.

New this year: One entrant among all submissions received from residents of Nunavut will be selected to win a trip to Iqaluit (along with one parent/guardian), including accommodations; an opportunity to be featured on APTN; and an invitation to participate in APTN's Aboriginal Day Live & Celebration in Iqaluit. The winner will also receive a cash prize of \$500.

In the case of both winners, if the designs were initiated as part of a school project, their school will also receive \$750 towards the purchase of learning materials.

## **First Nations youth discuss ideas for change: Thunder Bay conference sees youth offer ideas on education, culture and suicide prevention**

[CBC News](#)

Mar 25, 2013 1:06 PM ET

Youth taking part in a forum to discuss issues such as education, culture and suicide plan on making recommendations to government and First Nations leaders about how to make things better for their communities.

The three-day forum in Thunder Bay involves young people from more than 90 northern Ontario First Nations who will share their stories and opinions.

"The youth are putting themselves out there and they're ready to work towards change," said Kathryn Morris, a youth leader with the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

### **About the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth**

The Office of the Provincial Advocate reports directly to the Legislature and provides an independent voice for children and youth, including children with special needs and First Nations children. The Provincial Advocate receives and responds to concerns from children, youth and families who are seeking or receiving services under the Child and Family Services Act and the Education Act (Provincial and Demonstration Schools), including youth in custody. The Advocate identifies systemic problems involving children, conducts reviews and provides education and advice on the issue of advocacy and the rights of children. The Office is guided by

the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has a strong commitment to youth involvement.

"They're extending their hands and they're waiting for someone to grab it, and to help guide them towards that change."

Morris's organization is hosting the forum in partnership with the Inter-Governmental Network, federal and provincial levels of government, and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN). Two youth from each of 91 communities in the NAN, Grand Council Treaty 3, and Robinson-Superior territories are in attendance.

'Building a better future'

For the first two days of the forum they'll hold a series of workshops on the main topics. On the last day they will recommendations to dignitaries, who include representatives of government and First Nations government. The youth are hoping for a firm commitment from government and chiefs to work with young people on change.

"We realize that we need to find action-based solutions that will lead to meaningful programs and supports at the root level to meet the needs of First Nations children and youth," Morris said.

"We are stronger together and the forum gives us a chance to play a role in building a better future for our communities and to make them safer, stronger and healthier places for children and youth."

The event builds on the work started with Horizons of Hope, an event held 17 years ago to address the hopelessness and youth suicide in NAN communities and the lack of timely and comprehensive action since then.

"The most powerful voice for children and youth is their own," said Irwin Elman, Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

"I know these determined and passionate young people have an important role to play to effect change in their communities and find solutions to the harsh realities they face. If all of us can gather around them and listen, together we can find a way to move forward."



*First Nations youth leader Kathryn Morris says the young adults speaking at the conference currently being held in Thunder Bay will share some very personal experiences. (Supplied)*

## **Lost peers**

Morris and fellow youth leader Julaine Trudeau visited northern communities and talked to young people about their aspirations. They heard about hopes for simple things such as schools and playgrounds, but they also heard a lot about suicide.

Trudeau said she can talk from personal experience about losing friends to drugs and alcohol. She came to Thunder Bay for high school from Muskrat Dam and saw a lot of her peers lost in a transition to a community she said was not very welcoming to them. She added that many of them went back home without completing high school.

She also noted a lot of the youth speaking at the conference will be sharing their experiences.

"It takes a lot for (them) to do that because some of the issues ... are heavy subjects. And I think a lot of the youth may not have told these things to other people before ... we really need the government to grab our hand in this," she said.

According to the advocate's office, First Nations children and youth are one of the most vulnerable populations of young people in Canada. Compared to other young people in Ontario, First Nations children and youth are disproportionately represented in the youth justice and child welfare systems. They experience extreme poverty in greater numbers and face higher rates of malnutrition, disability, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide. Many live without access to education, housing, drinkable water or health care.

## **Third-world conditions taking a high toll on First Nations police force**

[Global News](#)

March 25, 2013 12:50 am

Jennifer Tryon and Rebecca Lindell

They work in isolated Canadian communities, alone and without breaks.

They deal with severe crimes without back-up or help.

They love their jobs, but many don't know how much longer they can last.

They are the [Nishnawbe Aski Police Service](#) and they are asking for help.

"We enjoy our jobs, go out there and do what we have to do, but still it can't continue the way we're going. Something is going to break," said Sergeant Brian Wesley, who works in Constance Lake First Nation in Northern Ontario.

Members like Wesley are speaking out about the work conditions, chronic underfunding and non-existent standards they say is pushing the force towards its breaking point and threatening to take the lives of officers with it.

NAPS is the police force that serves 35 remote First Nations scattered across Northern Ontario, many accessible only by air.

For Wesley, it offered him a chance to fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming a First Nations police officer and thought himself fortunate his first job was in his hometown of Moose Factory, just across the river from Moosonee, Ont.

But his dream job quickly turned into a nightmare.

While he went to the same college and was expected to enforce the same laws as his colleagues at the Ontario Provincial Police, Wesley's reality was much different.

Across the river in Moosonee, the OPP had 13 officers, a sergeant and support services. In Moose Factory, there were six officers for 2,500 people.

But with only two on duty at a time, it was a ratio that kept him working around the clock, often alone.

"We were going from call to call," he said. "With the lack of funding that we have, we react just to the calls we get."

Tune into Global National at 6:30 p.m. for Jennifer Tryon's report on the crisis facing the force.

Third-world conditions

Reacting often means showing up in volatile situations alone, no partner, no back-up, not even a two-way radio to call back to headquarters in Thunder Bay.

But escape doesn't come at the end of a shift. With few replacements and no easy or cheap way out of many communities, the only days off come if there are no emergencies.

And those days are rare in these communities where crime severity ranks as one of the most extreme in the province. Statistics Canada pegs the [rating](#) in NAPS territory at more than four times the provincial average.

"It's not uncommon for officers to have people banging on their doors all hours of the night trying to get their attention," said NAPS police chief Robert Herman. "It's kind of being held captive in the community you're actually policing in."

"What we're seeing with policing is a real double standard that exists in this country. The RCMP and the OPP would refuse to work in the conditions that the NAPS officers have to face on a daily basis," said Charlie Angus, the NDP MP who represents many of the communities.

He calls it third-world policing, but to Const. Lynda Jack, it's just another day on the job.

A routine call in her hometown of Attawapiskat, Ont. has seen her have to arrest her own family members because there was no one else to respond.

"If I have dinner with (my family), they won't bring up the issue. They know, I'm working," she said.

Officers like Jack often fill the gaps for other services that are not readily available in the North, playing paramedic, firefighter, counsellor, coroner and undertaker.

Jack said she rarely got time off after responding to a trauma to digest what she saw, heard, smelled or felt.

"It's part of your head, all the time, 24/7. Even if you try to forget it," she said.

### **NAPS plagued by stress, PTSD, suicide**

The conditions have taken their toll on Wesley, now a 15-year veteran on the force. His marriage crumbled. He started drinking. And the stress took over.

After five years in Moosonee, he was transferred to Constance Lake, but the stress came with him – a memory that still causes Wesley to break down in tears.

"The stress was too much, it started affecting my body, started to come out and the room just spun out of control," he said, recalling the day he finally confided in a colleague.

He took time off and was prescribed anti-depressants, but after five years the cycle started over.

"I thought about throwing in the towel," Wesley said. "The only thing that actually stopped me was my personal beliefs."

That wasn't how the story ended for his friend, Richard Wesley, a rookie with big hopes for the job.

Troubled by the suffering seen on the job and the inequality between police forces, Wesley said Richard Wesley, no relation, fell into a deep depression. He tried to get time off for a stress break, but the force was too short-staffed.

Instead, Richard Wesley killed himself with his own gun.

"We as a police service have to accept the responsibility of what happened to him because we should never have made him work that long, that hard," Wesley said.

One year later, NAPS officer Pauline Nguyen, 24, made the same choice, ending her life after dealing with work-related stress in 2012.



In Jack's case, the stress manifested itself as post-traumatic stress disorder – now nearly as common as fatigue and burnout.

After a suicide attempt, the single mother took time off and now sees a counsellor and makes more time for her two children.

"It's like a bottle, stuff it, stuff all the things in the bottle and then who

knows? We don't know when the bottle is going to explode," she said.

Cracks in that bottle are already evident. One in five of the force's 140 officers are on leave, most due to stress. Two officers have committed suicide in the last year. Another four have tried.

Herman, who came to NAPS after three decades on municipal forces, said he can't recall a single stress-related suicide during his time there.

There is also a 50 per cent turnover rate in the first three years, compared to the 85 per cent that last more than five years in other police forces.

Money, regulation needed: police chief

The force says more money and better regulation can help them turn things around.

NAPS is part of the First Nations Policing Program, funded jointly by the Ottawa at 52 per cent and Ontario at 48 per cent and has a \$25 million budget.

But Herman said it is not enough.

"We have huge overhead; our operational costs are extreme as compared to the policing environment and unless we're properly funded we can't address all the issues at the same time," he said.

Regulating it under the provincial Police Services Act, which covers the OPP, would also help, he said, by legislating standards that would force accountability to provide adequate detachments, radio systems and support for officers.

Public Safety Minister Vic Toews told Global News the government has extended the \$120 million First Nations Police Program for another five years. The provincial government has not responded to requests for comment.

But the Nishnawbe Aski Nation doesn't see much of that trickling down to the police force it is supposed to manage. Ottawa and Ontario agreed to a one year extension of the current agreement with a modest funding increase that the nation says won't cover their growing costs. A special federal fund that helped to recruit 11 police officers is also being shuttered this year.

The Nishnawbe Nation has issued a public safety alert to Toews and the Ontario government warning that NAPS officers are in "grave danger" and that the Aboriginal police force cannot continue to operate under these conditions.

When asked about the stress and extreme conditions facing NAPS officers, Toews said he hands out the money, the rest is up to the provinces.

In the meantime, NAPS revamped its family assistance program, came up with a critical incidents stress policy and trained an officer to be part of a critical incidents response team.

But it all takes money – money Herman has to find by looking for "efficiencies" in an organization that doesn't have enough to begin with.

## **Fish Lake Métis Local takes offense over premier's comment**



[Prince Albert Herald](#)

March 25, 2013

Tyler Clarke

*Herald photo by Tyler Clarke*

Fish Lake Metis Local 108 treasurer Rick Walker and president Bryan Lee, from left, are hosting an event at the John M. Cuelenaere Public Library on Tuesday at noon highlighting their opposition to recent comments made by Premier Brad Wall.

Premier Brad Wall's comments may have been well received in a room of local supporters on Thursday, but at least one group not in attendance is offended.

Premier Brad Wall's comments may have been well received in a room of local supporters on Thursday, but at least one group not in attendance is offended.

During the annual Prince Albert Premier's Dinner at the Art Hauser Centre, Wall said that the "best program for First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan is not a program at all -- it's Cameco."

"It's a job in the north, it's the chance to engage in the prosperity that we see in Saskatchewan. We will say yes to that opportunity."

The premier doesn't have the right to make such comments, Fish Lake Metis Nation Local 108 president Bryan Lee said.

"Cameco's not the end-all, and it's not the premier's position to determine what's in the best interest of First Nations and Métis people, either," Lee said.

"It's that old colonial thinking that resulted in the residential schools ... We know that's a failed policy."

By making such comments, Wall is also interfering with the legal requirement of duty to consult and accommodate, Lee said, noting that this process has not yet taken place.

Cameco's not the end-all, and it's not the premier's position to determine what's in the best interest of First Nations and Métis people, either. - Fish Lake Métis Local 108 president Bryan Lee

In December, Cameco signed a collaboration agreement with Pinehouse, worth approximately \$200 million over the next 11 years, mainly through employment income and business development.

"This agreement will create so much employment in Pinehouse that we're not even sure we'll have enough people to fill all of the positions, so it's a very good step



forward for us,” Pinehouse Business North executive director Julie Ann Wriston said at the time, highlighting one facet of the industry’s growing impact on the economy.

Fish Lake Métis Local 108 is hosting an event at the John M. Cuelenaere Public Library on Tuesday, beginning at noon, during which they plan on outlining their opposition to Wall’s statements, including a call for his resignation.

The Daily Herald will cover both this event as well as endeavour to share the Cameco and uranium mining industry’s counterpoint.

## **B.C. First Nations band takes Ottawa to court to stop pipeline expansion: A B.C. First Nation is taking the federal government to court, hoping to derail a plan that would allow Kinder Morgan to run a twinned pipeline across its reserve.**

[Toronto Star](#)  
March 28, 2013



*Darryl Dyck / The Canadian Press*

*B.C. First Nations groups have long been opposed to the Northern Gateway pipeline. Last summer, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, arrives for a news conference where he voiced his opposition to the pipeline. Now, a B.C. band is taking the federal government to court to stop the expansion of another pipeline.*

VANCOUVER—A British Columbia First Nation is taking the federal government

to court, hoping to derail a plan that would allow Kinder Morgan to run a twinned pipeline across its reserve.

Documents filed in Federal Court by the [Coldwater Indian Band](#) argue the Minister of Indian Affairs is ready to consent to the plan that would see almost triple the amount of oil move past its reserve near Merritt, B.C., located in the southern Interior.

The band is requesting a judicial review and wants the court to set aside any approval the minister may give to [Kinder Morgan](#), stating the minister has the legal obligation to act in the best interests of the band.

“As a fiduciary to Coldwater, the minister cannot impose such risks on Coldwater against their will,” states the document filed last week in Federal Court in Vancouver.



The band also wants the court to declare the government legally obligated to consult and share information with the band and follow its instructions.

The petition said the minister of Indian Affairs appears to be ready to make a decision without consulting with the First Nation or getting its consent.

No one from the minister's office was available to comment on the court action.

The government approved the original pipeline that runs through the band's Merritt-area reserve in the 1950s.

The current 1,150 kilometre pipeline runs from Edmonton to the Westridge Terminal in Burnaby, B.C.

The proposal is to expand the pipeline's capacity of 300,000 barrels per day to 890,000 barrels of oil and diluted bitumen, a molasses-like hydrocarbon.

"Dual pipelines constitute a greater threat to Coldwater's use and enjoyment of the reserve and require more space within the right-of-way area and a potentially larger area," states the document.

It said the two pipelines may also require a wider safety zone on or around the right-of-way.

Last week, the federal government announced changes to improve oil-tanker safety in a bid to boost support for both the proposed Kinder Morgan and Northern Gateway pipelines.

The changes would include annual tanker inspection, increased aerial surveillance and tough measures for pollution prevention.

## **Some First Nations members getting dinged with phone taxes**

[CBC News](#)

Mar 26, 2013 11:27 AM CST



*Amos Ratt says he's been wrongly charged tax on his phone bill, even though he's First Nations and lives on reserve land. (Ryan Pilon/CBC)*

Some Saskatchewan First Nations people on reserves say they're being taxed on their phone bills, even though the Indian Act says they shouldn't be.

Among them is Amos Ratt, a member of Lac La Ronge Indian Band living on reserve who has been paying tax on his phone for decades.

He says he didn't know his phone service was supposed to be exempt until recently when La Ronge advocate Ron Warner told him about it.

"I never paid no attention to [the tax] — just get a bill and go pay it," he said. "I think I got some money coming now or maybe a few months of bills I don't have to pay."

Warner said he's been notifying First Nations people about being wrongly taxed on their phone bills since the 1990s and has called SaskTel four times.

"They refuse to stop charging tax, they say that each person has to complain individually," he said.

SaskTel says First Nations people need to provide a treaty card number to be exempt from federal GST and provincial PST.

The phone company has reimbursed some customers, but decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

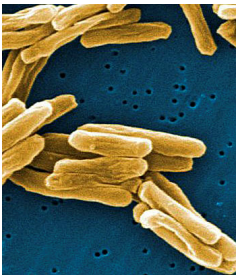
The Canada Revenue Agency says it will accept complaints from SaskTel customers who do not get reimbursed.

Inuit strategy on TB calls for more action

**"It is unconscionable that TB rates among Inuit in Canada remain steadily at Third World levels"**

[Nunatsiq Online](#)

March 25, 2013



*Infection with TB bacteria, shown magnified here, leads to the development of TB.  
(FILE PHOTO)*



Tuberculosis among Inuit has been increasing at an “alarming pace,” Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami said March 25.

TB is now about about eight times more prevalent in Nunavut and Nunavik than it was in 1997.

That’s although overall incidence of the disease in Canada has been trending steadily downward, according to numbers cited in the [“Inuit-Specific Tuberculosis Strategy,”](#) which ITK released to coincide with [World TB Day on March 24.](#)

In 2011, the reported incidence rate of TB for Inuit was nearly 254 times the rate reported for Canadian-born non-

aboriginals, and roughly 38 times the rate reported for Canada overall, the strategy said.

“It is unconscionable that TB rates among Inuit in Canada remain steadily at Third World levels,” said ITK president Terry Audla in a March 25 news release. “The release of this strategy is a positive step forward. It sets the path for an action plan, one that will lead to reduced TB in Inuit Nunangat.”

Tackling TB will take a long-term commitment and money, the ITK strategy said.

The strategy talks about how overcrowded and poorly ventilated housing, limited access to nutritious food, and variable access to health care services can contribute to the development of TB.

TB is an infectious disease that usually affects the lungs, although all other organs may be involved. If untreated, the disease can be fatal.

"Last week's federal budget was the opportunity for Ottawa to tackle head-on the social inequality that helps this disease thrive among Inuit," said Audla, who promised to continue lobbying in Ottawa "for immediate attention to these issues."

Expansion of programs such as in-community x-ray clinics, like [the community-wide x-ray testing offered in Kangiqsualujjuag](#) during the 2012 outbreak there, and the [Taima TB project in Nunavut](#) and new tools for TB detection, treatment, and prevention all play a part in lowering the level of TB among Inuit, ITK said.

And, with more than 70 per cent of Inuit in Nunavut and Nunavik smoking, the strategy also recommends making sure more Inuit are aware about the links between smoking and TB.

Overall, the strategy calls for more community education, "Inuit-appropriate prevention control and care programs," more research and good evaluation and reporting of TB cases.

## **Sask. education study finds on-reserve schools receive 40-50% less funding**

[Regina Leader-Post](#)

March 26, 2013 3:12 PM

Betty Ann Adam



*SASKATOON, SASK.: MARCH 26, 2013 -- FSIN vice chief Simon Bird listens to speaker Robert Kowalchuk who wrote a report on native education funding, March 26, 2013. (Gord Waldner/ The StarPhoenix) Photograph by: Gord Waldner, The StarPhoenix.*

A new study of Saskatchewan education funding reports that on-reserve schools receive 40- to 50-per-cent less funding than off-reserve schools.

The comparison of Government of Canada funding for First Nations schools on reserves with provincial funding for off-reserve schools was commissioned by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN).

The federal funding regime provides \$50 per pupil per year for instructional resources such as books and computers, while the provincial funding model provides Living Sky School Division, for example, \$688 per pupil, said study author Robert Kowalchuk.

"If you want to talk about inequity, there's a real hard example of what it takes to provide resources ... Where is the fairness in what you're providing for kids?"

FSIN vice-chief Simon Bird said it is time for Ottawa to address the chronic underfunding for First Nations schools.

"We are still very much an afterthought when it comes to investing in this province and this country," Bird said.

The result has been high unemployment among First Nations people while employers recruit abroad, persistent poverty among aboriginals and increasing numbers of aboriginal people in prisons, he said.

Ottawa must work with First Nations to create a new funding model and that much more consultation is required than has been conducted so far, Bird added.

The study also showed how much on-reserve schools in the North Battleford area would get if they were funded for all education services and programs at the same per-pupil allocation as provincial school divisions.

Instead of \$7,231 per pupil, the on-reserve schools would receive \$11,894 in the mostly-rural Living Sky division or \$10,908 in Light of Christ division in North Battleford.

That comparison showed the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises receives \$16,665 per student to provide education to preserve their language and culture, as guaranteed in the constitution.

"We would love to have that amount of money," Bird said.

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## **First Nations infrastructure gets \$7 billion boost**

[Journal of Commerce](#)

March 27, 2013

Kelly LaPointe

The federal government is investing \$7 billion over the next 10 years to improve water and wastewater infrastructure on First Nations reserves, it announced in its 2013 budget.

"There is a huge need across the country for improved water systems, for improved wastewater systems, improved infrastructure just writ-large on First Nations," said Bill Ferreira, director of government relations and public affairs for the Canadian Construction Association (CCA).

"We're pleased to see the federal government actually taking a leadership position on this issue and investing a significant amount of money into the development of infrastructure on First Nations."

The funding will be invested under the existing Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program.

It will continue to provide support to First Nations, primarily for health and safety related infrastructure projects, such as water, wastewater treatment facilities, schools and housing.

Under the new \$14 billion Building Canada Fund, \$155 million over 10 years will be allocated from the National Infrastructure Component to the First Nations Infrastructure Fund managed by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

Funding from the Gas Tax Fund (GTF) component of the Community Improvement Fund will also be allocated to the First Nations Infrastructure Fund, with this allocation based on First Nations population on reserve.

This fund focuses on five priority areas: improving First Nations energy systems, such as linking to power grids and sustainable energy systems; broadband connectivity; garbage disposal, including landfills and recycling; road and bridge projects and improving community capacity for infrastructure planning. Funding allocated from the new Building Canada Fund and the GTF will be at least equivalent to the level of funding allocated under the 2007 Building Canada plan.

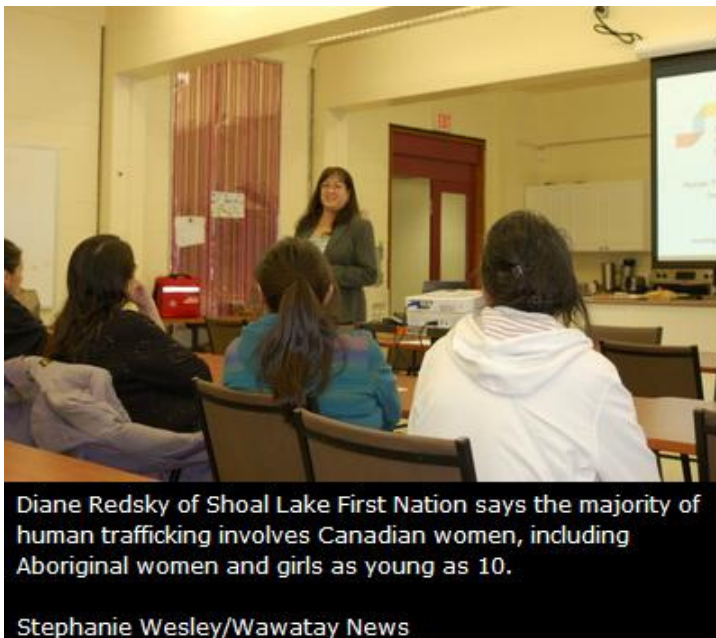
"We're hoping that will not only contribute to a better living standard for people living on First Nations reserves, but also help them become more active participants in the overall broader economy, which we think would be extremely positive," said Ferreira

## **Human traffickers target Aboriginal girls, women**

[Wawatay News](#)

Wednesday March 27, 2013

Stephanie Wesley



Diane Redsky of Shoal Lake First Nation says the majority of human trafficking involves Canadian women, including Aboriginal women and girls as young as 10.

Stephanie Wesley/Wawatay News

The reality of the sex trade in Canada, which involves for the most part victimized young girls hidden in underground sex trade and human trafficking networks, was a topic of discussion during two separate events held in Thunder Bay this March.

Bridget Perrier, co-founder of the anti-prostitution group Sex Trade 101, and Diane Redsky, a project director with the Canadian Women's Foundation, were part of the two dialogues.

On March 6, Perrier sat on a panel that was put on by the Gender Issues Centre at Lakehead



University. Perrier told the audience of 40 or so people that she entered the sex trade as a child and exited as woman.

"I still sleep with the lights on," Perrier said, who has been out of the world of prostitution for 10 years. "I still suffer from the effects of the trauma (of prostitution)."

The panel itself consisted of four women, including Perrier. Three of the four had been involved in prostitution, and had started at a young age.

Redsky's presentation, which took place March 18 at the Ontario Native Woman's Association (ONWA)'s Thunder Bay site, went into detail on how prostitution was not a choice when it came to human trafficking.

Redsky, of Shoal Lake First Nation, works with the Canadian Women's Foundation on the National Task Force on Human Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada.

Though the presentation was open to the general public as well as frontline workers and social workers, there was a small turn out of people at the event. Perrier noted as well at the sex trade panel the lack of social workers, law enforcement, media, and frontline workers present in the audience.

"They should be here learning, hearing first hand about the women and girls they work with," Perrier said.

"Human trafficking is not the same as human smuggling," Redsky said. "With smuggling, one pays a fee to enter Canada and they are free to go, with trafficking once they get here they are not free to go."

Redsky also dispelled the myth that human trafficking only happens with people who are coming into Canada, which she said does happen but that the majority of human trafficking cases involve Canadian citizens themselves. "The trafficking started and occurs in Canada."

"There is an overrepresentation of Aboriginal women and girls being trafficked in Canada," Redsky said. She stated that Aboriginal women and girls are targeted for their vulnerabilities and that they experience more violence than any other cultural group.

"As of September 2012, 72 human traffickers have been convicted in direct and related cases, 69 pending cases, 164 victims, most of the victims are Aboriginal women and girls," she added.

"And who are the victims?" Redsky asked. "The majority are marginalized women and girls who were sexually exploited at a young age, some as young as 10 years old, homeless youth, kids in the child welfare system, with a demand for young and younger girls."

"For one young woman or girl, a trafficker will have a financial gain of \$300,000 a year," Redsky said. "Many traffickers will have multiple girls, two to five young women. The younger the girls are, the more financial gain."

Redsky said that the amount of financial gain that the trafficking of young girls bring is something that the traffickers want to protect, which is why there is a deep underground network of traffickers across Canada.

"If you think it (human trafficking) is not happening in Thunder Bay, then you are wrong," Perrier said.

"What do you think of when you hear the words juvenile prostitution?" Redsky asked. "Someone older who chooses the lifestyle? Now how about when I say child abuse? Someone younger, and someone is hurting them. We should never call it juvenile prostitution. Those two words should have never been put together."

Redsky said that in Ontario, child protection legislation does not protect all kids. "One has to be under the age of 15 to be considered a child in need of protection. This creates a vulnerability for young people because there is no safety net for them."

"With younger girls, there is a bigger financial gain," Redsky said. "Sometimes they are as young as 10, with the average age being 13. Eighteen to 19 years old is less valuable, and those in their early twenties are almost of no value to the traffickers. The demand for them is not the same. That's who you will often see in the survival sex industry."

"Nobody sees the bigger picture," Redsky said. "We need to build an understanding of what she has gone through."

## **First Nations filmmakers use business skills, social media savvy to bring TV shows to niche markets**

[Vancouver Sun](#)

March 26, 2013

Jenny Lee



*Loretta Todd in studio with scene from her TV pilot Skye and Chang in Vancouver on March 13, 2013. Todd is hoping the pilot will be picked up as a series by the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, Vancouver Sun*

It's a tiny niche in an otherwise troubled industry, but B.C.-based aboriginal filmmakers are busy and working.

Vancouver director Loretta Todd's one-hour action series pilot *Skye & Chang* is among at least five aboriginal

productions shot in B.C. the past year. Jason Friesen's *Health Nutz* comedy series is in its second season on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, and Steve Sxwithul'txw's 13-part aboriginal sports series *Warrior Games* is in production for fall broadcast.

"Activity has been strong in the west, that's for sure," said Peter Strutt, former APTN director of programming who executive produced *Skye & Chang*, worked on *Health*



Nutz and is a producer of yet another aboriginal project, UnderExposed, a youth documentary series on photojournalism to be broadcast this fall.

"A lot of times, the big Hollywood productions get all the focus. People are asking what has been going on. APTN is going on," Strutt said.

Strutt said he's noticed many more projects being pitched than normal, but said the number of shows that are actually licensed may appear large only relative to the cooling off in B.C.'s broader film industry.

Nevertheless, today's indigenous filmmakers are a business savvy crowd who talk marketing strategy, art and social media all in the same breath. Where 10 years ago, shows focused heavily on documentaries exploring identity in authentic voices, today's projects include dramas such as Health Nutz and the four-Leo-award-winning Alberta production, Blackstone, Strutt said.

But working with culturally mandated APTN doesn't mean an easier financial path, Strutt said. "They are a large national broadcaster and still have the same requirements for audience numbers. It's actually a little more challenging because the budgets are very frugal and you have to deliver the same quality as for another broadcaster. People have to be willing to think outside the box."

Loretta Todd's Skye & Chang is "a science fiction martial arts mash-up," about Skye Daniels, an aboriginal woman (Sera-Lys McArthur), and her friend Emily Chang (Olivia Cheng), who run a Chinatown dojo, own a bodyguard company, and are involved in a sci-fi conspiracy.

The pilot, set in Vancouver, will air on APTN this fall and Todd is waiting to hear whether the network wants an entire series.

Financing structures are complicated. Some of the money comes as equity, some has to be repaid and the licensing fee is a straight fee. When APTN gave Todd a \$50,000 licence fee, she applied to the Canada Media Fund's aboriginal language program for the rest of her budget. "I pay back 43 per cent every time I have revenue," Todd said, referring to a previous show. She produced and directed three seasons of a Sesame Street-inspired series teaching kids the Cree language.

"If you're in the mainstream, budgets for pilots are \$600,000 to \$800,000," Todd said. "I got around half of that (for Skye & Chang,) but the opportunity to make a pilot for something, that's meaningful for me. I didn't pay myself anything. That's life. I had some development money for the project in the past."

Todd's lead characters were originally men, but she revamped the show with female leads, a sci-fi element and plot opportunities to introduce different cultural communities. She foresees worldwide niche market appeal for strong female characters who are modestly dressed. Turkey is one possibility.

"I was thinking about the long-term strategy in terms of business, in terms of trying to create a series that could be lucrative for me and the film community and I was looking for a way of doing that with something that would have a cultural meaning and significance to me," Todd said.

If the series goes ahead, Todd will give Olivia Cheng's character a cellphone. The show's website will include a game allowing visitors to "hack into the imaginary cellphone and get lists of where she shops and where she eats. It's a kind of product placement in a more narrative way, incorporated right into the social media of the series. That's the way I could have business partnerships, community partnerships."

First-time producer Steve Sxwithul'txw is a former Lillooet police officer who went back to school at 37 to study broadcast journalism.

Now 47, he works full-time with the Vancouver Island Health Authority as an aboriginal coordinator for recruitment and retention, and shoots Warrior Games on the side.

Sxwithul'txw hosts the show, which explores traditional and contemporary indigenous sports across North America. Sports is a natural way to connect with youth, he said. "Our nations are so connected to sport. A lot of people don't know about that because they aren't engaged with First Nations other than the negative news you hear out there."

His first proposal for Warrior Games was rejected by APTN for lack of logistical detail. It's a very competitive process with as many as 200 producers vying for a licence, Sxwithul'txw said.

"We had ideas about what we wanted to do and knew what the sports were, but who were we going to be talking to, where would we be staying, which elders would be involved, where would we be going to shoot, how are they getting there?" He brought in seasoned executive producer Patti Poskitt to manage the financing. He has a \$1-million budget to produce 13 episodes and pay everyone, including himself. "The larger budget shows are moving elsewhere," he said. "We are still able to function in this environment, but we are smaller-budget. I'm not employing a lot of people, maybe 12 or 13 and this is not on a full-time basis."

Jason Friesen's Health Nutz is about the antics that ensue after the owner of the Health Nutz Juice Bar fails to return from Las Vegas and it becomes the property of the fictional North Vancouver Indian Band. The band's chief appoints his son, Axel Salmonbelly (Wesley French), to manage the hang out.

Friesen hired Vancouver-based online games company, Ayogo, to create Health Nutz' online campaign complete with a game. Social media is "is part of our deliverable," Friesen said. "When we do a TV show, we do webisodes and little excerpts of the characters....We have Twitter, Facebook, YouTube. We're using all those social media outlets to promote. Everyone is."

Friesen first pitched Health Nutz to Telefilm Canada more than 10 years ago. Along the way, he and co-producer Dasha Novak say they've learned "to be resourceful and not to turn down small projects that might lead to bigger projects. The first project, we took on a budget everyone was laughing at, but that opened the door for the next two seasons," Novak said.

They created an entire season of a previous animated show in six weeks using Emily Carr University studios during summer vacation. They had two staff and six student animators and completed everything on time and on budget. "You use these little projects as stepping stones to prove you can be creative and resourceful with a really tight budget," Friesen said. "We don't have a big overhead. We work predominantly at the kitchen table."

"We work with what we get, not with what we want. But at the end of the day, we have two programs that are on national TV. Other producers have studios. We do it with — a lot of times — one-tenth the budget."

The decline in B.C.'s broader production industry has affected them. "The camera guy who you used on your first season and you really want to have come this season? Now he's moved to Toronto because the guy's been starving," Friesen said.

## **Onion Lake to flout new finance rules: Cree Nation won't comply with order**

[Star Phoenix](#)

March 28, 2013

Jeff Davis

The Onion Lake Cree Nation will defy the federal government's new law ordering First Nations bands to publicly disclose financial information, Chief Wallace Fox says. The move sets Onion Lake on a collision course with the Harper government, which has said any band that fails to abide by the new rules will have its funding cut off.

"It is state-sanctioned blackmail, pure and simple," Fox said Wednesday. "It's legalized extortion."

Bill C27, which came into force this week, requires First Nation governments to publicize audited financial statements and the salaries and expenses of their chiefs and councillors.

Fox said his Onion Lake already discloses financial details to band members and has no obligation to inform outsiders.

"I work for the people of Onion Lake, so I'm accountable to them, and nobody else," he said. "Indian Affairs didn't elect me."

Onion Lake, located 50 kilometres north of Lloydminster, is wealthier than many other reserves, in part due to income from oil and gas projects. Fox said his band has enough money to carry on without federal funding for the time being.

"Think we're going to starve? I don't think so," he said, "The have-not nations have to sign ... they don't have the resources we do."

First Nations were only given 48 hours to provide comments on legislation before it was introduced, which Fox said is not enough time to give a well-considered response.

Onion Lake has submitted a written objection to bill C27 to Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt, Fox said.

Formal dispute resolution is the next step, he said, but it appears no system is in place to do so.

"As per dispute resolution mechanism, they're scrambling today to figure out how do we deal with Onion Lake," Fox said.

He said many chiefs he has spoken with also oppose the new legislation.

"Many of the chiefs have the same opinion on Bill C27," he said. "We have not been consulted on anything."

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## **A primer on treaties coming soon**

[Winnipeg Free Press](#)

March 28, 2012

James Wilson



JOE BRYKSA / FREE PRESS ARCHIVES

Stephanie Woodhouse shows \$5 bills she collected on behalf of herself and children at annual treaty payment at The Forks last June.

At the risk of sounding like a blatant pitchman, I'd really like you to read something this weekend. It's a special publication in Saturday's Winnipeg Free Press and it's called Our Past -- Our Future.

During yet another week when First Nations issues continued to be in the news, there's one thing that's becoming abundantly clear, and that's just how much more Manitobans all need to learn about each other and the history most of us share.

Treaties are a fundamental part of that shared history, yet, despite best efforts, they continue to be badly misunderstood.

The point of Our Past -- Our Future is to help bridge this gap with stories of the struggles and successes Manitobans have faced together during the 141 years since the names of our ancestors -- First Nations and non-aboriginals -- were affixed to Treaty 1.

Not all of the stories are pretty, nor the opinions expressed universally agreed upon. But everyone deserves a voice and the right to make it heard, which guarantees the content and the long overdue conversations flowing from this special publication will be lively ones.

I'm an educator and a strong believer in the power of conversation as the pathway to bringing people together. Not only do I believe it, I've experienced it first-hand and have seen racism and mistrust melt away simply because two people took the time, and the leap of faith, to get to know and better understand each other.

Over the section's many pages, you will experience stories shared by individuals and communities who have battled rampant racism and, together, made huge strides to overcome their racially charged histories.

You will learn a lot more about current issues such as urban reserves and the potential for the Kapyong land to be transformed into a thriving area for economic development, if that decision moves ahead. You will also hear about the successes in Saskatchewan, which is 20 years ahead of Manitoba when it comes to building these kinds of business partnerships.

We also invite you to learn more about Idle No More and the growing frustration that gave rise to this movement and to take a look back in time for a primer on the historical treaties, signed over the last 100 years, and how they are celebrated on Treaty Day each summer.

As we look to a stronger future together, you'll discover it resting in the hands of our children in stories that introduce the Treaty Education Initiative -- a school-based program that, we hope, will one day be integrated in K-12 classes, just as it already is in Saskatchewan.

These are only a few snippets of what you will find in this publication and we encourage you to take the time to read them.

Of course, it goes without saying that it took a partnership to make this publication possible and you might be surprised at the mixture of voices who stepped up to the plate, including from our educational community: Brandon University, Canadian Mennonite College, Red River College, St. Mary's Academy, University College of the North, University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, and Yellowquill College. Without question, they see education as the epicentre of this way forward.

As I travel about Manitoba as the treaty commissioner, the question I am most often asked is, "What do treaties that were signed so long ago have to do with any of us today?"

The short answer is -- everything.

Back when Treaty 1 was first signed, the chiefs of the day saw the changing world in front of them -- a world of decimated buffalo populations, increasing railroads and settlement -- so they negotiated and secured terms they felt would help them survive.

They secured the right to hunt, fish and trap on their traditional lands in order to preserve their way of life, but they also asked for assistance in being able to grow into agricultural and capitalists economies. Importantly, they also secured access to teachers and schools so that future generations could benefit from an education system that would allow them to successfully make their way in the new world.

In return, they granted future Manitobans many things, including access to the land and the right to own it. This Treaty right alone has allowed our province to flourish, creating a great deal of the economic wealth that is collectively enjoyed today.

Ours is a partnership that is 14 decades old and, like any relationship, it has not been without its hurdles. My ultimate hope, however, is we can all find a way to return to our original vow of working together, as equal partners, in order to do what is best for our entire province and for generations yet to come.

There's a discussion underway in Manitoba and we hope you'll become a part of it.

*James Wilson is commissioner of the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba, a neutral body mandated to encourage discussion, facilitate public understanding, and enhance mutual respect between all peoples in Manitoba.*